

Opening Statement of
Deputy Ranking Republican John Curtis
House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on National Parks,
Forests, and Public Lands
Legislative Hearing on 4 bills
07.18.2019

As Chair Haaland noted in her opening remarks, the Subcommittee meets today to consider four pieces of legislation.

I am glad to see that the majority has scheduled H.R. 2819, offered by Congressman Kim, to help pave the way for a Gold Star National Monument in our nation's capital to honor mothers of those who made the ultimate sacrifice defending the United States. While we cannot possibly repay the enormous debt that we owe Gold Star Families, this bill offers

necessary flexibility to the Monument Foundation in their noble endeavor to create a monument here in DC to honor Gold Star Family's sacrifices.

I am also appreciative of the majority's inclusion of H.R. 1492, offered by Congressman Tipton of Colorado, to authorize a locally supported boundary adjustment for the Yucca House National Monument. This monument, a perfect example of the proper adherence to the Antiquities Act's "smallest area compatible" requirement, began as a 9.6 acre site to protect Ancestral Puebloan artifacts in Southwest Colorado. This bill seeks to add 160 acres of donated land that is adjacent to the monument.

Also being considered today is H.R. 401, offered by Congressman O'Halleran from Arizona. This is a commonsense bipartisan bill

that authorizes a no-cost conveyance of certain federal reversionary interests in a small parcel of former Forest Service land that is now used by the Lowell Observatory in Flagstaff. I am encouraged to see that Committee Democrats are willing to advance legislation that removes the reversionary interest from a parcel of land. This bill is a great example of local elected Representatives working together to solve local problems, and I am pleased that the bill recognizes that, quite often, reversionary interests held onto by the Federal Government in land transfers turn out to be unnecessary. I support the language, and the approach of this bill, to eliminate reversionary interests when transferring land to state and local governments for economic, scientific, or educational purposes.

The final bill before us today is H.R. 1572, offered by Congressman Quigley from Illinois, which seeks to improve botanical science research at the Department of the Interior and the U.S. Department of Agriculture to aid in land management activities. This is certainly an admirable goal.

Unfortunately, many provisions of this bill raise red flags for me and others on this side of the dais. Some provisions of this bill are redundant and substantially overlap with current federal law.

Additionally, the bill would require the Secretary of the Interior to hire 20 additional botanists and establishes a completely new student loan repayment program as a hiring incentive.

Further, as currently drafted, the language of the bill provides for a permanent authorization of these new programs, including language authorizing “such sums as may be necessary.”

While I commend the bill’s sponsor for promoting increased use of native plants as part of proper land management, I remain concerned that the bill may not be necessary as federal agencies involved currently have authority to hire botanists, and that according to the Congressional Research Service, there are over 50 existing student loan repayment and forgiveness programs, including two already used by the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture. Hopefully the testimony which we hear today will help address some of these questions and concerns.

Thank you to all the witnesses for their presence here today, and we look forward to your testimony.